

New platform gives voice to Mediterranean artisanal fishers

Barcelona, Spain: WWF welcomes the launch this weekend of a European association of Mediterranean artisanal fishermen that provides a voice and a platform to this historic and crucial sector of European fisheries in light of the current reform of EU fisheries policy.

“For too long artisanal fishers, especially in the Mediterranean region, have been sidelined by the powerful big industry players whose lobby on EU decision-makers is all too successful,” said Dr Sergi Tudela, Head of Fisheries at WWF Mediterranean. “WWF throws its full support behind this unique initiative in the region and encourages more artisanal fishers’ groups to join up – the more fishers represented, the louder the voice and the greater the chance of being heard.”

Representative artisanal fishermen from France, Greece, Italy and Spain gathered in the port of Arenys de Mar in Catalonia, Spain, on Friday and Saturday to agree on common principles for sustainable fisheries management in the Mediterranean Sea – based on the ideas of bottom-up co-management of common resources, environmental sustainability and economic and social viability.

A study assessing recent status of fish stocks in the region concludes that some 89 per cent of the assessed stocks are overfished and in decline – underlining the need for a radical change to fisheries management and approach.

The artisanal fishing sector represents a majority of fishing jobs around the Mediterranean – and in many instances uses low impact gears and practices that yield highly priced harvests by local markets. In European Mediterranean countries local demand for fish largely exceeds production by local coastal fleets.

2012 is the deadline for a complete overhaul of the management of European fisheries by the EU Commission, and WWF is active in pushing for the complex Mediterranean reality to be fully taken into account and central to the new policy.

Sustainable artisanal fisheries are a strong element of the reform process, showing how low impact traditional methods of catching fish, highly efficient in energy consumption, are sustainable and support coastal communities.

“Our new platform will provide artisanal fishers with a strong and permanent voice in fisheries discussion forums, and will also enable small-scale fishermen from across the Mediterranean to get our heads together and share experiences and best practice,” said Ramon Tarridas, an artisanal fisherman from Spain and the elected manager of the new association.

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